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SIPDIS

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (ADDED SIPDIS CAPTION)

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [BE](#)  
SUBJECT: PKK: FOLLOW UP ON KARTAL

REF: STATE 164892

Classified By: POLCOUNS TED ANDREWS. REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

1. (S/NF) Poloff discussed reftel points with Andre Ceulemans, the Foreign Ministry's Deputy Political Director and Adviser for Counterterrorism Issues, requesting a clarification of Remzi Kartal's status in Belgium. Poloff indicated the issue had become important because of contradictory information received from two Belgian agencies.

While the Belgian Interior Ministry told Embassy last year that Kartal had only permanent residency status in Belgium and was not a political refugee, the Foreign Ministry had recently said the opposite. Ceulemans said Kartal is a political refugee and has had political asylum in Belgium since April 1995. He said Kartal was among several former Kurdish parliamentarians who fled Turkey in the 1990s and received asylum in Europe because of perceived persecution in Turkey. When questioned, Ceulemans said he did not know why the Interior Ministry provided erroneous information, except certain elements within Interior may have had "sensitivities" regarding providing information on political refugees. (Comment: Ceulemans seemed embarrassed at the disconnect between the Interior and Foreign Ministries. He asked Embassy not to relay the MFA's "clarification" on Kartal's status to our contacts within Interior. End comment.)

2. (S/NF) Ceulemans said he did not know if Kartal provided false or incomplete information when applying for asylum -- at the time of application, the Interior Ministry would have assumed his information was true. If Kartal provided false or incomplete information on material issues, Ceulemans thought that could be grounds for a re-consideration of his status.

3. (S/NF) Ceulemans equivocated a bit when asked whether Kartal's leadership role in a designated terrorist group would affect his status now or when it is up for renewal. He said certain activities could affect one's refugee status but "that is not the case here" as far as he could see. Ceulemans said while the PKK was listed on European sanctions lists for purposes of freezing PKK assets, "it does not mean the PKK is considered a terrorist organization" throughout Europe.

4. (S/NF) He said Belgian authorities want information to bring cases against the PKK, especially evidence that members, including Kartal, are involved in criminal activity. As far as he knew, there were no pending investigations or criminal charges against Kartal (note: Embassy's LEGATT has been granted a briefing soon on Kartal's file from the Belgian Federal Police). Even with an Interpol warrant,

Belgian officials need concrete information from countries, especially Turkey, to pursue investigations and cases. Ceulemans reiterated Belgium's ongoing request that the U.S. urge Turkey to provide better, more detailed information that would hold up in Belgian courts. He indicated Belgium had also made the request to Ankara. Ceulemans said respect for due process and human rights was a major issue: "we cannot bring people to justice on flimsy evidence." Ceulemans said Belgium would act if it saw evidence of PKK criminality or training camps.

¶5. (S/NF) Comment: Despite an increase in coordination among Belgian Ministries over the past couple of years, there remains at times a disconnect on key issues, which hopefully will be ironed out through such mechanisms as the recently operational OCAM (the "Coordinating Body for Threat Analysis"). OCAM, fashioned to operate like our National Counter Terrorism Center, aims to facilitate the exchange of information among all governmental counterterrorism bodies and make a common threat analysis on the basis of such information exchanges.

¶6. (S/NF) Some elements of the Belgian government have a tendency to put PKK activities in the "political speech" camp. This is particularly true in Flanders, where some see the Kurds as a fellow small nation striving to gain a national identity. Ceulemans, for example, pointed out there is a perception that the PKK "does not want difficulties in Belgium." It preferred to use Belgium as a political base to lobby international groups, and, thus, members refrained from obvious criminal activity (he acknowledged that extortion of local Kurds likely existed but cases could not be brought without community assistance). Despite the "political speech" rhetoric, the Belgians have consistently indicated a willingness to pursue cases against PKK members if they can present evidence of illegal activity that will hold up in court. End comment.

FOX

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